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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this extensive pilot investigation were twofold: a) student input regarding policies and procedures related to the conduct of the voluntary program was solicited; b) more importantly, the investigation was designed to procure relevant data pertaining to the physical activity backgrounds and other selected characteristics of students who elected classes at the University of Washington during the spring quarter of 1971. Classes were randomly selected from six strata; 226 students ultimately completed the questionnaires, which were designed and administered by the investigator. On the basis of specific findings of the investigation, two general conclusions appear to be warranted. First, students who elect physical education at the university have extensive background in both instructional and organized extracurricular programs of physical activity--a finding supportive of the hypothesis that structure begets structure. Secondly, the homogeneity of responses to questions regarding the subject's identification with visible groups of students and their respective participation in social and campus activities constitutes a basis for the hypothesis that students who elect physical education at the college level might constitute a distinct subculture of the total student population. (Author)

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Characteristics of Students Enrolled in the Voluntary Program of Basic Instruction at the University of Washington*

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The dearth of empirical data related to the physical activity behaviors of college age students as well as the absence of satisfactory macroscopic models which attempt to explicate voluntary and habitual physical activity behaviors continues to restrict the understanding of the very phenomena that are currently the substance of physical education programs. It follows that programs of basic instruction in higher education and to a lesser degree, programs in secondary education that are predicated on their ability to meet the needs and interests of students would function with optimal effectiveness to the extent that such data becomes available.

In view of the need for and paucity of such data, this extensive pilot investigation was undertaken. Its purposes were essentially twofold. Given the novelty of voluntary programs of basic instruction for college age students, student input regarding policies and procedures related to the conduct of such programs was solicited. More importantly, the investigation was designed to procure relevant data pertaining to the physical activity backgrounds and other selected characteristics of students who actually elected classes in physical education at the University of Washington.

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In the interests of more effective sampling, classes were divided into six strata: aquatics, individual-dual sports skills, team sports, fitness-oriented activities, recreational activities (e.g. sailing, canoeing, and riding), and contemporary dance. The structure of the activities, the demands they impose upon participants as a result of their structure, and the environment in which they were performed were instrumental in the establishment of the strata proper and the subsequent assignment of classes to an appropriate category. Entire classes were then sampled at random from each of the six strata.

226 students comprised the final sample; 106 students represented the individual-dual sports skills, the largest stratum, while only twelve subjects represented the equally small dance stratum. Questionnaires designed for the study and administered by the investigator were completed by each subject. The responses to the various items were hand-coded and keypunched prior to analysis via the CDC 6400 computer.

The constituency of the sample proper was of some interest in and of itself. In spite of the availability of such classes to all students, both undergraduate and graduate in a multiversity of 33,000 students, 81 percent of the sample (n=183) were from the College of Arts and Sciences. Sixty-seven (67) freshmen comprised the largest fragment of the total sample (29.6 percent), while sophomores, juniors, and seniors were virtually equally represented (about 21 percent of the sample from each class). There were only sixteen graduate students in the final sample of 106 males and 119 females (one subject unclassified).

Because the value of student input regarding course policies and procedures is often institution-specific and is therefore of limited research value, only a select number of responses need be reported in a cursory manner. These may be outlines as follows:

1. The quality of the instruction emerged as the greatest strength (80% rated it good or excellent) and the most often-cited weakness, with no apparent patterns emerging as functions of gender or stratum.

2. 87.2 percent of the sample judged the course in which they enrolled to be worthy of academic credit. Better than half (60.6 percent) of the 226 believed that the credit determination should be one or less. Albeit the majority favored restricting the number of credits that might be applied toward degree requirements, there was no consensus regarding the exact limitations relative to credits earned in physical education.

3. With respect to grading policies, 34.5 percent of the sample indicated that all courses should be conducted on a pass-fail basis; 62.4 percent favored a choice for each student between conventional letter grades and pass-fail. Only four students demonstrated approval of the conventional grading system as the sole method of evaluation. Factors utilized in determining grades, according to students, should be weighted as follows (from most important to least important): improvement, skill as demonstrated by performance, attendance, skills exams, and lastly, written exams.

With regard to the more important objective of the pilot study, that of ascertaining the physical activity backgrounds of students, the initial hypothesis was that students who elect physical education at the college or university level would have extensive backgrounds in formal physical activity programs. Briefly, they would view their high school programs of physical education (and their junior college and/or college required programs) in a highly favorable manner, they would be more likely to have participated in intramural programs and interscholastic athletics, and they would have pursued formal instruction in a sport in an extraschool context. The results obtained in this pilot study amplify the existence of such patterns, pointing

toward a process of preselection suggested directed by Gallon (1958) and Faulkner (1968) and implied in Carpenter's pilot work in high schools (1972).

77 percent (n=174) of the sample had completed two to four years of required high school physical education; only four had no such required program. Interestingly enough, the same number indicated that high school physical education requirements should be continued. Of the 56.2 percent who could elect additional classes after completing the requirements, 66 percent of those presented with the option took advantage of the opportunity. Better than half of the sample (55.8 percent) rated their high school experiences as good or excellent, albeit boys were more likely to give their programs optimal ratings than were girls. 75 percent of those subjects in contemporary dance, however, rated their high school experiences below average or poor. 38 percent of the sample had completed required programs of physical education at community colleges and/or at the University of Washington before the requirement was removed.

Beyond the extensive exposure to school physical education programs, the sample exhibited tendencies toward participation in formal extramural and extraschool programs and formal instruction. Better than half of the total sample (52.7 percent) had participated in high school intramural programs. 35.8 percent (n-81) had participated on interscholastic athletic teams; better than half of the males in the sample had such experiences. Of those enrolled in team sports classes at the University, 60 percent were former varsity athletes.

Previous formal instruction in a sport in a context outside the school had been pursued by 63.3 percent of the sample (n=143). Almost a third of

these subjects had paid a fee for such instruction. Of those who received such outside instruction 74.18 percent were enrolled in either aquatics or individual-dual sports skills. Other cross tabulations revealed that those electing outside instruction were likewise the majority of the constituents who rated their high school physical education as good or excellent (n=89) and who participated in intramurals (n=80) and athletics (n=57). Although the acquisition and betterment of skill was the primary reason for the election of courses at the University (82.7 percent, n=187), 46 percent of the sample had received previous formal instruction in the courses in which they were enrolled at the time of this investigation.

The extensive backgrounds in structured or formal programs of physical education and physical activity lend credence to the hypothesis that structure begets structure. The present sample not only was exposed to a wide range of such programs, but obviously sought more of the same, perhaps having become dependent upon such structured physical activity experiences. Albeit this pilot did not contain a matched sample of non-electors, Gallon's (1958) sample of non-electors at the University of California at Berkeley indicated that awkwardness and embarrassment in motor skills and a fear of low grades were primary reasons for their actions. Faulkner likewise suggested that physical activity behaviors were well established upon college entry. All of this points to a preselection process whereby those who elect physical education at the college or university level are the very ones who had extensive participation patterns in the first place.

Newcomb's (1962) work with college age students has underscored the importance of peer groups in determining the behavior of college students,

groups that are often formulated after college entry. Utilizing selected items from Newcomb's questionnaire, exploratory inquiries were made about the extent to which this sample shared certain patterns of behavior. 49.6 percent (n=112) replied that a close friend had also elected a physical education course; slightly less than half of those who replied in the affirmative (n=53) indicated their friend had taken the same course. In a university where commuting is commonplace, 37.6 percent (n=85) lived in off-campus housing, either in private apartments (n=34) or with their parents (n=51). 36.7 percent (n=84) resided in dormitories or fraternities and sororities.

Utilizing Newcomb's five point scales for determining campus activities and the subjects' self-identification with visible campus groups, the following tendencies emerged (Pearson r=.278, p .001):

1. Subjects tend to be actively involved with individual studies and research as well as concerned about maintaining an active social life.

2. They indicate extremely low involvement in intramurals, student government, and student clubs; of greater importance, apparently, are concerts, plays and exhibits.

3. No tendencies in one direction or the other can be drawn from responses to questions about involvement in world affairs, athletics, and school spirit activities (e.g. homecoming).

4. Generally, subjects do not identify with minority groups or with students interested in campus issues and events.

5. Dichotomies were observed in relation to the degree of identification with athletes and those interested in good times or "party types."

The common patterns which emerged (the rather weak overall correlation notwithstanding) might be expected in view of the initial hypothesis to the

effect that this group of electors might emerge as a distinct subculture in the university as Newcomb had reported the existence of same. Intercorrelations among items, however, meld with the suspicions of the investigator that there might well be biases in the instrument which produce such patterns. Thus, while it might provide a praiseworthy hypothesis for future investigations utilizing revised and more extensive measurements, on the basis of this exploratory study, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the extent to which the sample might be construed to consititute a distinct subculture in the university.

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